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Stress Management Tips for EPA's Emergency Responders

Critical Incident Stress Management

A critical incident is an event that can tax or overwhelm your usual coping mechanisms. These events can be natural disasters, terrorist incidents, industrial accidents, or more personal events that can involve fear, largescale destruction, injury, or death. The stress you might experience after exposure to such an event could affect you emotionally, physically, cognitively, and behaviorally.

Because of the nature of your job, you might also find yourself experiencing stress for a number of other reasons: long (work) hours, physical demands of the assignment, bad weather, logistical problems, extended periods away from your family, friends, and others.

Stress reactions can occur while you are responding to an event or a few hours or even days, weeks, or months later. These reactions are quite common and normal for disaster responders. If you find yourself experiencing stress reactions as a result of your response to an event, you can help the reactions to pass more quickly by talking with supportive family members, friends, a member of the EPA Emergency Response Peer Support & CISM Team, or the EPA Employee Assistance Program.

Some Common Stress Reactions

Physical:

- Fatigue/Exhaustion
- Sleep Disturbances
- Nightmares
- Appetite Changes or Digestive Problems
- Headaches

Cognitive:

- Difficulty Concentrating
- Flashbacks
- Difficulty Making Decisions
- Memory Disturbances
- Confusion
- Problem Solving Difficulties

Emotional:

- Fear
- Guilt
- Emotional Numbing
- Over Sensitivity
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Anger
- Irritability

- Frustration

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Helping Yourself

- Spend time with family and friends
- Talk, talk, talk—talking is the most important healing medicine
- Resume your regular daily routine
- Exercise
- Eat healthy
- Avoid excessive use of alcohol or caffeine
- Keep a journal—write about your reactions

Remember, if you are experiencing any of these reactions, they are normal reactions to an abnormal situation.

With Regards, Steve



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"Frequently, my thoughts get bored and walk down to my mouth. Often, this is a bad thing."